

June 28, '82.

Jakarta.

Dear Blanch⁹,

Thank you for your letter in which you explain why you think mindfulness in daily life is too difficult and why you think one should first achieve one-pointedness and calm before there can be any insight. It is a point one often hears and I think it may be of some use also to others if I bring up this point again for discussion for my other friends.

You write about mindfulness of all the nāmas and rūpas of our daily life, such as seeing, visible object, hearing, sound, etc.:

Madame Sujin devised it for very busy people like yourselves who, perhaps, are constantly ~~hardened~~ bombarded and beset by this type of stimulants. The mind, in these cases, must be overly busy and strained sometimes with overwork and its many official and unofficial duties and responsibilities with, of course, very little time to sit in restful, relaxing meditation.

You then continue and state that calm or pervasion of the mind is a rest so needed by the mind, and that calm must be cultivated through meditation.

About the business of life, I do not think it makes any difference whether one is rushing to social functions, one's relatives, or looking at the purple mountains, or sitting crosslegged in a meditation room. Our thoughts are always busy, one falling away, the next one arising. Even when one is 'alone' one is not really alone when there is still attachment which arises more often than one would ever have thought. When one is honest, is it not true that one always lives with one's thoughts, one's dreams, one's hopes and expectations? 'Self' is important, one wants the self to be successful, even in meditation and calm.

What is that calm then, so much sought after? Is it the true calm ~~of the~~ which is freedom from attachment, aversion and ignorance? Or is it a subtle attachment to relaxation? Attachment can blind us so much. How can we know whether there is the right calm or only what we take for calm? How can one check? Can we check whether there is attachment at this very moment? If we cannot check this now, how could we ~~check~~ ^{check} it later on? The test is at this moment. There are many moments of seeing and then, very often, attachment to details and outlines, to concepts, even when we do not think of wishing. We like to see the familiar things around us, that is attachment ~~is~~ already.

Is there an idea of 'I see', 'I think', deeprooted in us? Does seeing seem to last for a while? When there are wrong ideas about seeing how otherwise but through mindfulness of seeing when there is seeing wrong view be corrected? Does it seem that we see people and Do they seem to last? Is there any other way to correct this w

view but knowing the characteristic of visible object when it appears, of knowing the characteristic of thinking when it appears, of knowing all realities as they appear, one at a time? Should we not know the difference between seeing and thinking of concepts such as people or trees? Seeing and thinking are different cittas arising at different moments and they experience different objects. They arise and then ~~fall~~ fall away immediately, they do not last.

Are we inclined to think that it is too difficult to develop right understanding of realities in daily life because there is no immediate result of our development? Then one may be tempted to look for some other way, different from the development of right understanding in daily life. Are we not always finding excuses not to develop it in daily life?

It is actually because of our defilements that it is hard to develop right understanding. If we cling to immediate results we will make it even harder. Why don't we have the patience to develop understanding little by little, starting at this very moment? There are realities all the time and at least we can begin. We cannot expect to have full understanding at once of seeing, hearing etc. But what does that matter? When one is only intent on the present moment one does not worry about the many lives one still has to live in order to have full understanding. And anyway, we do not have understanding, it is understanding which develops and understands. I do not see any other way in order to know that it is the seeing which sees, not self. That it is the hearing which hears, not self. That it is the thinking which thinks, not self. There is no other way but knowing their characteristics when they appear. If one tries to concentrate on ~~these~~ such realities, or thinks about them, or tries to direct phenomena there is thinking about stories and concepts but not the direct experience of the realities which appear. When we think of seeing the characteristic of seeing cannot be directly experienced. And we will keep on living in the world of thoughts only, with lobha, dosa and moha. (attachment, aversion and ignorance).

It is good to remember that the Buddha repeated that it is 'no easy matter' to attain full knowledge. We read in the 'Kindred Sayings' (II, Ch XXI, Kindred Sayings about Brethren, par. 6, 11, 12) about different monks who attained arahantship. We read that the Buddha said about Kappina: (par. 11):

...That monk is highly gifted, monks, of wondrous power. No easy matter is it to win that which he formerly had not won, even that for the sake of which clansmen rightly leave the home for the homeless, even that uttermost goal of the divine living which

he has attained~~d~~, wherein he abides, having come just here and now to know it thoroughly for himself and to realize it.

The Buddha would not repeatedly say that it is no easy matter if there were some other way of developing which would be easier. When there is ignorance about all realities which appear, ignorance which is deeply accumulated, how could it be easy to get rid of it?

In the Buddha's time there were many monks who had accumulations for jhāna, and also the Buddha himself, when he was still a Bodhisatta had developed it, but he had found that this was not the way to enlightenment. When someone has accumulations for calm, what should he do? Knowing the characteristic of calm as not self, as impermanent. Thus, see it as only a reality which arises because of conditions. And when there are conditions for akusala citta, also that characteristic should be known as not self. The Buddha did not say that one should first develop calm. It depends on one's accumulations. And then, if one thinks one has accumulations for calm, right understanding has to be very keen and sharp in order to know it is not a subtle attachment to self who is so calm. One can be misled one's whole life.

As to teachers, one can listen to different teachers, but finally one has to decide for oneself which way one wishes to go in life. I ~~have~~ have never liked the idea of obedience to a teacher. The Buddha said that there is no refuge outside, only the development of satipatthana can be one's refuge. A teacher cannot do it for you.

Khun Sujin is a good friend, not a teacher. She did not 'devise' any method, as you seem to think. She reads all the teachings and the commentaries, and ~~a~~ suggests others to do the same and check for oneself. It is the Buddha who explained to be mindful of any reality which appears in daily life.

How then, did I have the idea to listen to Khun Sujin? Because I found that she had practical advice which really works. I liked her insistence to check everything myself. From time to time I pass Bangkok but most of the time I am on my own and I like it. I have the ~~xxx~~ teachings, the scriptures, and my writing is a way to study and be reminded to develop more understanding. If someone else has different accumulations and finds that he or she has to follow another way, I ~~think~~ think that no arguments at all can stop that person, accumulated inclinations are so deep, so strong. They drive someone into this or that direction.

I just received a letter from Sarah with interesting quotes of her discussions with Khun Sujin about daily life. The suggestions are again so practical, so full of 'common sense' as we would say in conventional terms. But they are the fruit of right understanding in daily life.

First I will quote a remark of Sarah. She first thought that she had to be in a quiet place and lived for some time in a temple. She said about her experience:

The more I understood that it is impossible to control life because it is conditioned from moment to moment, the less inclined I was to follow a particular practice in order to try and have quick results in a special quiet environment. There is no sudden enlightenment without the gradual development of understanding and awareness, however much our wishful thinking would like to think otherwise. I understood more clearly, from my reading and considering with friends, that Buddhism cannot be separated from our daily life. It is only some who are naturally inclined to living in a temple.... We need to be aware of the realities appearing through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind at this moment. There is no other moment. .. There is no moment when there is not a truth to be known. Greed, hatred, kindness, generosity, hearing and sound are not just words or labels, but they represent phenomena which can be understood with awareness when they occur.

As to Sarah's discussions with Khun Sujin, Sarah felt torn into many directions in her daily life in order to do her many different duties well.

...She is emphasising how it is not just understanding the ~~the~~ problem, but understanding one's defilements which conditions that problem... otherwise the understanding is very superficial; because the root is not the problem itself, but one's own ~~defilements~~ ~~lack~~ lack of understanding and one's own defilements... When we talked about the problems I found in certain social situations, ~~when~~ when perhaps the conversation seemed uninteresting and I was wishing for another situation, Khun Sujin emphasised the importance of mettā (lovingkindness). We have heard so much about mettā and how its characteristic is, that it is the quality of lovingkindness to all, to anyone we can help at the present moment. Yet we seem to forget and need to be reminded over and over again.

Khun Sujin kept asking me, when I said I tended to think a lot about family and friends a long way off, 'What about the people around one now?'....

When there is a little mettā to those around, one can see ~~mettā~~ how much more happily or easily one's life begins to run and how we can see others as friends at such times (however unknown to us they may be), instead of looking critically towards them. End quote. I would like to add something. One can understand more about mettā if one sees that it all comes back to the citta now.

Is it a citta with mettā? Then there is friendship, no need to think of this person or that person. If one misses a particular person and likes his company when he is around it has not to do with mettā, it is attachment. The difference should be known, only through mindfulness of the different characteristics. When considering mettā, mettā is not to be limited to particular people or situations.

I will continue quoting now:

One of the areas we discussed was the difficulty in frequent social contact, in situations involving many people. Khun Sujin referred frequently to the 'guests through six doorways'. She reminded us that there are uninvited guests all the time, whatever the situation, and that we should learn to be more accepting and tolerant of whatever 'guest' (in this absolute sense) there is, in whatever situation we find ourselves, and this with more understanding....

I would like to add: then one minds less whatever reality arises, it arises because of conditions. When there are conditions for akusala it will arise and all that can be done is knowing it with right understanding. When there is ~~more 'tolerance'~~ ^{I quote:} one will not try to force a change of situations, ... Understanding helps to have less attachment and aversion, instead of just wanting to be happy and have the situation at will... Whatever appears as anattā (not self) can condition right understanding with awareness. Then one will enjoy everything in one's life, because the understanding of everything in one's life conditions its very growing, instead of wishing to have steady pleasant feeling all the time, or all good things in life.

End quote. I add: If I am honest, I like steady pleasant feeling and all good things in life, but I also know that this is an illusion. ~~xx~~ With Susie I like the four pleasant worldly conditions and I need to be reminded that they lead to sorrow. When I was on my journey with the princess and prince, I did not like being overlooked, being unimportant. Yet I took up a sutta and was reminded by words I had heard over and over again. I quote: from Kindred Sayings IV, Part VIII, Kindred Sayings about Headmen, par. 11. The Buddha asked Bhadragaka:

'Now what think you, headman? Are there any people in Uruvelakappa owing to whose death or imprisonment or loss or blame there would come upon you sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair?'

'There are such people in Uruvelakappa, lord.'

'But headman, are there any people in Uruvelakappa owing to whose death or imprisonment or loss or blame no sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair would come upon you?'

'There are such people in Uruvelakappa, lord.'

Now, headman, what is the reason, what is the cause why sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair would come upon you in respect of some, but not of others?'

'In the case of those, lord, owing to whose death or imprisonment or loss or blame there would come upon me sorrow....I have desire and attachment. And as for the others, lord, I do not have such desire and attachment in their case.'

We read further on that the Buddha said/ that he would also know with regard to the past and the future thus:

'...Whatsoever ill that has arisen in the past--all that is rooted in desire, caused by desire. And whatsoever ill that will arise in the future, --all that is rooted in desire, caused by desire. Desire, indeed, is the root of ill.'

I had to solve all my problems alone, Lodewijk was in Holland and I accompanied the princess and the prince on their journey for ten days. It helps to be reminded by words of the sutta and one can hear them over and over again. One is reminded of realities, it all depends on conditions what will happen next, gain or loss, praise or blame. But it is our own attachment, attachment to self one finds so important which makes us unhappy. The sutta reminded me to be aware of the present moment. When one sees that it is the only way to cope with life and when one sees how ignorant one is and how much one clings to the self, one is really motivated to go on developing right understanding. There are conditions for sati in daily life if one is really motivated.

Just now I had a conversation with my husband about the above subject. He heard of colleagues who had received honours which he had not received and he realized that he was jealous and that jealousy is so ugly; ~~but~~ when it arises one may reason and reason but it will not go away by reasoning. I remarked that attachment to the self conditions very coarse akusala, such as jealousy. The sotāpanna who has eradicated the clinging to self has also eradicated jealousy, through the development of understanding of nāma and rūpa in daily life, the only way. Then one can begin to understand one's life ~~from~~ which is actually a moment of experiencing an object. Sometimes the object is pleasant, sometimes unpleasant, it depends entirely on conditions. When one sees life as a series of conditioned phenomena, there will be less opportunity for jealousy. I remarked to Lodewijk that when one sees how one is overpowered by jealousy and other akusala dhammas one is really motivated to develop right understanding of nāma and rūpa and he agreed. I said that one can use such events as reminders to be aware now.

Thus, we have enough reminders in our daily life, if we only use them: our different defilements, the uncertainty in life as to the four pleasant and the four unpleasant 'worldly conditions', praise and blame, etc., the fleetiness of our own life and that of others, separation from what we like and the persons we like, so hard to bear.

I also discussed with Lodewijk his drive to work on and on. Is it all kusala, or is there also akusala? There is so much disappointment when the outcome of our work is not as we expected and then there is aversion. I quote from Sarah's discussions with Khun Sujin a hearty remark:

...We forget that it is the thinking of ourselves, making ourselves important, conceit (māna) about the outcome of our work, instead of just doing what we can, that makes life difficult at these times.Khun Sujin pointed out that one should consider why and for whom one is performing or doing one's job. Is it often our own ideals or ideas that we are more concerned to carry out?

In other words, there is a lot of self in seemingly noble motives. Do we recognize that? It can be known through the development of right understanding. Paññā can know everything, all the details of our life. Paññā has to be keen, precise, exact. That is why phenomena such as seeing or hearing have to be known as well, they should not be overlooked. Does our life not consist of many moments of seeing or hearing? Is it not true that defilements often arise on account of what was seen and heard? Why then do we neglect seeing and hearing and why would one rather develop calm first? Then one makes a long, complicated detour, one may be misled easily by clinging to calm. In the end one cannot get away not knowing seeing and hearing, why not begin right now?

Sarah discussed with Khun Sujin her clinging to concepts such as 'Adelaide', the place where she lives, and clinging to stories about people and situations she likes or dislikes. In reality they are only nāma and rūpa. Khun Sujin often advises not to try to change one's life, it is conditioned already, but to 'follow' it with sati. I quote:

Of course it is hard to see with sati when Khun Sujin says that with sati

....Following life with sati. This is another way of describing how there should be more awareness and understanding of the 'uninvited guests' through the different doorways. Instead of comparing or thinking of another situation, one can learn to follow what is conditioned already, and develop sati. If one is in a hectic work situation or feels one is torn in too many directions,

as I suggested I felt, what can one do? Panic and worry obviously do not help....Of course it sounds very easy when Khun Sujin says 'just follow life with sati'. I started thinking or worrying about the same situations arising when I would return to Adelaide. She suggested 'cutting the story' with sati. A moment of awareness which is aware of thinking as thinking can help to make the story a little shorter each time. If there is more consideration for others, what we are used to thinking of as the / unpleasant situations can slowly become pleasant.

It is so obvious that real happiness in life is not a matter of following the objects of our attachment but helping to make others happy and fitting in with what they would like. Yet, even though we have heard this and it seems clear at a time, it is still such a change of direction that it is only gradually obvious on more than a theoretical level.

Ebd quote. Cutting the story with sati. We live most of the time with our thoughts, our dreams, it is conditioned. But now and then there can be a moment of sati in between, and that is the moment there can be some understanding of what is real. Straight after this Khun Sujin speaks about consideration for others. Is there a connection of sati and consideration for others? Yes, very much so. When we begin to understand realities we find self less important. We accept situations as they are and this gives a sort of happiness which is not selfish, although there may be clinging again to this kind of happiness, but even that can be realized also. I ~~find~~^{found} that all this is true during my journey with the Princess and Prince. It was my duty to consider their happiness in the first place, so I did not mind so much my own tiredness. I do not like hanging around souvenir shops, but this time I was pleased when the princess enjoyed it, even after a long day on the lake with boating and swimming. She was after that shopping for more than two hours. During the long drives in the car I thought of our long trips in the bus together with Khun Sujin in India. I was reminded to be mindful of nāma and rūpa. I noticed how we are attached to every inch of our body and this reminded me not to neglect the hardness or softness which appeared, in order to know them as only rūpas. I was also thinking of the happiness of the others which were in the company of the princess and ~~price~~^{prince}, and they did not always harmonize together, as may happen in a company where there are different people together on a journey. There were many opportunities to be a little more considerate for others. Sometimes I was very tired and not so happy, but then I remembered that it is not considerate to show an ugly face to others, and that helps.

I sometimes have cocktail parties which are dull, but when there are a few moments of sati it is refreshing, unpleasant situations can become pleasant. Because then it does not matter so much any more where one is or with whom one is. Sati conditions patience with the different situations in daily life. This letter is becoming long, but I want to illustrate how sati is for daily life, not for the meditation room. How otherwise could we lead our daily life in a more wholesome way.

We should not underestimate a moment of right mindfulness of one nāma or rūpa at a time. We should not underestimate the process of accumulations of understanding. Khun Sujin spoke to Sarah about ~~anattā~~ 'proximity condition', anantara paccaya. This is one of the 2 types of condition among the 24 kinds. Each citta which arises conditions the next one. For example, votthapana-citta, which determines in the sense-door process whether it will be followed by kusala citta or akusala citta is proximity condition for the succeeding citta. There are usually seven javana-cittas, in the case of non-arahats kusala citta or akusala citta. Each one of them conditions the succeeding one. I quote:

....She was discussing different conditions in order to help to see the anattāness of all phenomena. In particular, she was discussing anantara paccaya or proximity condition to point out how the ^{moments of} understanding (of the nāmas and rūpas) which succeed one another can lead to less clinging to 'Adelaide' as something or some situation. If there is more awareness that defilements also are not self, there will be less clinging to self. She pointed out that 'by not developing awareness whenever defilements arise, the defilements can rule over other dhammas. It seems obvious, and we know so well in theory what reality is and what awareness is and yet so often seem to be 'back at square one' (it seems we have learnt nothing when it comes to the practice, N.)

Sarah's whole report about the different problems she experienced in the different situations of life seemed so familiar to me, they are the problems we all have, however much different our situations may seem to be. The situation is not important, we all have defilements and these cause us problems. With understanding of our daily life we can cope better with these problems and there are more conditions for consideration of others and more conditions for all kinds of wholesomeness.

With mettā,

Nina van Gorkom.